WHY BLAME the MASONS?

By
Jay MacEss

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WHY BLAME THE MASONS?

By Jay MacEss

Who started it all? That's the question.

Here in this country American Catholics as a general rule, live in perfect peace with neighbors and business associates who are Masons. But every now and again a Catholic plans to join a Masonic lodge, or a Mason wishes to enter the Catholic Church, or a Catholic girl wants to marry a Mason, or a "Catholic Mason" dies and his family goes to the parish priest to arrange for a funeral Mass. And then, the trouble begins.

The bride-elect, the prospective Mason, the would be Catholic or the anxious widow immediately comes into collision with

A Hostile Organization

That organization is the Catholic Church. She declares herself the irreconcilable enemy of Masonry. Catholic women are warned not to marry Masons; Catholic men are told not to join the Masons; lodge members desiring to enter the Catholic Church are instructed to abandon Masonry; Catholics who have joined the Masons are refused a Catholic funeral. To the average citizen it looks like wanton aggression. Why should there be this bitter hostility between the Catholic Church and Masonry?

Who Started It All?

The answer of the average man to the above question will no doubt be based on his general impressions. He is aware that the Catholic Church has repeatedly forbidden her children to become Masons. He probably traces this prohibition to some unjustifiable suspicion in the minds of the Church authorities, or to some vague and ancient dispute that has no practical application here and now. Or he may believe that the Catholic Church has been nursing a grudge in France and Italy for several generations and is now trying to take it out on Masonry in the United States of America. Thus it seems as if harmless Masons who, like good Americans, try to live on friendly terms with all their neighbors, are being subjected to an unreasonable discrimination.

Naturally the Masons feel bewildered. They are

Free, White and Twenty-One

If they are eligible bachelors why can't they marry Catholic girls? Why can't they join the Catholic Church, if they so desire? Why can't they invite their Catholic friends to join the Lodge? And why can't those friends be buried from a Catholic Church after death? The apparent answer to all these questions is: Because Catholic ecclesiastical authorities are intolerant. It looks like another

proof that the Catholic people are priest-ridden and that their leaders are petty tyrants, unfamiliar with American conditions.

Before going any further, however, it will be wise to take a glance at the Church's official actions and see whether or not they are really as represented.

Here Are the Facts

Eight different Popes, in seventeen different pronouncements, and at least six different local councils in North America, have fulminated against Masonry.

The earliest condemnation of secret societies by the Church took place 190 years ago, just twenty-one years after the organization of the first Grand Lodge. From that date to this, as noted above, the ecclesiastical authorities have repeatedly condemned the Masons and similar secret organizations. The condemnation of 1738 mentioned specifically only the Masons and the Carbonari, but in 1894, to the list of societies forbidden by name, were added the Odd Fellows, the Sons of Temperance, and the Knights of Pythias.

Catholic Bishops and pastors have given precise instructions on the attitude to be assumed toward these associations. The Catholic people are warned

Not to Join

any of the above named societies. If they have joined, they must withdraw. Should Catholics who are Masons present themselves for confession, they are to be refused absolution unless they withdraw. Membership in the other three societies named in 1894, must also be given up, except in certain cases when nominal membership may be retained on specified conditions.[1]

The Canon Law states that the faithful are to be warned not to marry those who are members of societies condemned by the Church. Nor may a parish priest assist at any such marriage, without having first consulted the Ordinary, who will require an assurance that proper care is to be given to the Christian education of the children and that there is no proximate danger of perversion. Christian burial is to be refused to those who are com-

[1]A decree issued on January 18, 1896, allows a nominal membership in these three societies, if in the judgment of the Apostolic Delegate four conditions are fulfilled: 1, That the society was entered in good faith. 2, That there be no danger of scandal. 3, That grave temporal injury would result from withdrawal. 4, That there be no danger of perversion. To these provisions, the Delegate generally adds these others,—that the member shall promise not to attend meetings or frequent the lodge-rooms, that he shall send his dues only by mail or by a third party, and that in case of death, the society shall have nothing to do with the funeral.

On June 27, 1913, the Holy See extended this faculty of the Apostolic Delegate to each of the Provinces of the United States. This faculty is for all the Dioceses of the Province. The conditions for nominal membership remain the same. (Cf. John J. Graham, *Doctrine of the Church on Secret Societies,* p. 11.)

monly known to have been members of forbidden societies at the time of death.

This does indeed, look like rather drastic legislation. It leaves no doubt of the Church's hostility toward Freemasonry. And the innocent bystander is raising a pertinent question when he asks, "Who started it all?"

Why Is Masonry Condemned?

This question is actually on the lips of many Catholics, as well as of many non-Catholics. And some of these questioners do more than merely submit a request for information. They make indignant protest against the action of the Church,—frequently in words like these:

"How can the Catholic Church offer a valid excuse for such fierce hostility to the Masons? There is nothing in Masonry to offend the religious sense. Masonic assemblies give the Bible a place of honor; they invoke the Creator with respect. Masons support many charities of their own and subscribe generously to the religious and philanthropic works of others. They often respond generously to Catholic appeals. Their organization is a distinct benefit to the Community. Masons of high degree affirm that in Masonic assemblies they have never heard a single word spoken against either religion or social order."

If these statements are true, it does seem at first sight rather strange that Masonry should be so strongly condemned by the Catholic Church. Are they true?

Well, yes,—at least in part. Some of them are quite obviously true, at certain times and in certain places. Large numbers of Masons, especially in the English-speaking countries show

No Antagonism

toward the Christian religion or the Catholic Church. They are honorable men and good citizens, who have joined the Masons mainly for social or business reasons. They vigorously resist the effort of Masonic leaders to enroll Masonry in the campaign against parochial schools and in similar crusades. It is with perfect sincerity that these men resent the attitude of the Church toward their organization.

But Catholic writers claim that these friendly and benevolent Masons are usually not at all interested in the fundamental principles of Masonry. They are not familiar with its history, and as a rule, they do not read the publications which interpret Masonic ideals. That helps to explain why the average good-natured American Mason cannot for the life of him understand the Church's condemnation of his order.

He Does Not Know the Facts

An example is cited by Father Malloy:

"In a friendly discussion with a man who was Past Master of a Lodge in New York and who had been a member of the Grand Lodge of the State, I called attention to some particularly

Violent Attacks

on the Catholic Church and on religion in general, that had appeared in *The New Age* and in other Masonic publications. He was fair enough to say when he had verified my quotations, that what he read,—I quote him exactly,—'gave me quite a shock, for I had not dreamed that any Mason or body of Masons, or any publication concerning Masonry in the United States of America had ever been guilty of the sentiments mentioned.' He had been of the opinion, as so many others are, that the Catholic Church was narrow because she would not permit her members to become Masons, and that the Church entirely misunderstood Masonry. The fact is that it is Masons, many hundreds of them, who misunderstand Masonry."[2]

This sounds interesting. Apparently the Catholic Church claims that she is only defending herself against Masonic attacks. It would be a grim

[2]*May Catholics be Masons?* by Rev. Joseph I. Malloy, C.S.P. (The Paulist Press, N. Y.)

sort of jest, should the protesting Masons prove to be the first aggressors. If, under a program of benevolence, or behind a smoke-screen of good citizenship, Masonic leaders have been secretly using their organization in a systematic campaign against the Catholic Church, then every right-minded man will, of course, be glad to see a "showdown." The American spirit would commend rather than blame the Catholic Church for coming out with an open declaration that men must choose one side or the other, and that she will never recognize as a loyal Catholic a man who wants to be

On Both Sides At Once

So we come back again to the still unanswered question, "Who started the row?" Let us try to get the answer. The complaint of the Masons has already been heard. What has the Catholic Church to say on the other side?

Representatives of the Catholic side of the controversy are not lacking.

Father Gruber, who wrote on Masonry at considerable length in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* and elsewhere, has been praised for his thoroughness and accuracy by numerous Masonic writers.

Father Thurston, author of the Catholic Truth Society pamphlet *Freemasonry,* has an enviable reputation on both sides of the Atlantic as an unusually competent historical critic.

Mr. Arthur Preuss, who published the good sized volume, *A Study in American Freemasonry,* drew from a Masonic reviewer the comment, "It is written in a calm argumentative manner, giving authorities for all the allegations the author makes."

Dr. Cooper of the Catholic University at Washington, who wrote a series of articles on Masonry in the *Ecclesiastical Review,* had access to several thousand volumes of Masonic literature,—and his strictly scientific temper is a matter of common knowledge.

Among the other writers are Father Michael Kenny, author of *American Masonry and Catholic Education,* Father Malloy, *May Catholics be Masons?* and Father Lucian Johnston.

From these sources, available to everyone, it is easy to learn the Catholic side of the case. Let us review the chief points submitted for consideration.

The Fundamental Objection

of the Catholic writers is that Masonry tends to become a rival religion of Christianity. It is a sort of organized unsectarianism, presenting a philosophy of life, possessing temples, altars and a ritual, teaching a creed and a moral code. In its early stages, it was largely inspired by the rational-

ism of the day; and it professed to represent a sort of primitive religion in which all men agree,—a marked contrast to the Catholic idea of Christian revelation. This was the chief ground on which it was condemned in 1738 and still remains an objection,—especially, since the intervening years show that apostasy has often followed hard upon entrance into a Masonic lodge. To the point is a statement by Preuss:

"And here, as the eye of a Catholic priest roams over these pages, let him realize more fully, why it is so difficult, even on a death-bed, to reclaim a Catholic who has been a Mason. The difficulty is not a mere moral one, it is an intellectual one. It is not merely a disobedience to the Church and the neglect of her sacraments; it is a complete and formal apostasy from the faith, in which the very nature and essence of the Christian God is denied, as well as the nature and essence of the Christian soul. What is there to work on? Without a miracle of grace,—nothing. Were it mere passion, or interest, or worldly motives that had led the heart astray but had left at least the roots of faith; had there been only 'a change' and not 'a total extinction of the past,' the nearness of eternity and the fear of an offended God might revive what had long lain dormant and as dead. But when the very roots of faith have been plucked up, and every religious and moral tie has been

broken; when the great intellectual transformation of Masonry has been wrought, and not one single dogma repudiated but the whole Catholic system rejected as error, helplessness, and ignorance, the case is, as Masonry knows, and as it has cunningly planned, well nigh hopeless."[3]

The Second Objection

The original condemnation of 1738 denounced the Masonic oath as immoral in principle. Catholics aver that such an oath is equivalent to a blind acceptance of anything and everything which may be imposed. Despite protests to the contrary, it involves an unwarranted surrender of the individual conscience into the hands of unknown and possibly unprincipled superiors. As history shows, it easily lends itself to grave abuse.

Other Objections

Another reason for the Catholic attitude is found in the injuries actually inflicted on the Church by organized Masonry. So far as the for-

[3] *A Study in American Freemasonry*, p. 78.

A recent writer in *The Week* of Calcutta thus summarizes the main objections to Freemasonry:

1. It promotes indifferentism, making all religions meet on the plane of highly vaporized Deism.
2. It treats the Bible, Prayer and Religious Ritual as empty formulas and stage effects.
3. Most important, it benumbs the instinctive yearning of the soul for true religion and in the end destroys it altogether.

eign countries are concerned, the situation is too well-known to need description. Latin Masonry has violently attacked the Church wherever and whenever possible. It achieved the confiscation of Church property and the enactment of anti-Catholic legislation in Italy, France and Portugal. The Grand Orient boasts that recent anti-Catholic agitations in Spain, Mexico, South America and the Philippines were the work of Masons. In a word, Latin Masonry has practically proclaimed war on the Catholic Church. Father Thurston quotes an item that appeared in the New York *Times* of February 23, 1913:

"The aim of the Grand Orient is to destroy all religion beginning, of course, by crushing Roman Catholicism in France, to overturn all thrones hostile to its designs and to establish a world-wide republic, but a republic of which its own high-priests are to be the dictators."[4]

The same author quotes from a speech of M. Delpech, member of the French Senate and President of the Grand Orient of France.

"The triumph of the Galilean has lasted twenty centuries; but now his day is over. The mysterious voice which once announced the death of Pan,

[4]"That these aims have not in any way altered since the war is proved by a remarkable compilation of the published utterances of representative Masons extracted from the official reports of the Congresses and Conventions of the Craft, which has been recently given to the world by A. G. Michel under the title of 'La Dictature de la Franc-Maçonnerie sur la France.'" (*Freemasonry*, p. 23.)

today announces the downfall of the impostor God who promised an era of justice and peace to those who believed in him. The illusion has persisted far too long. This faithless God now gives place in his turn. He passes from the scene to join in the dust of ages his fellow deities of India, Egypt, Greece, and Rome who saw so many deluded worshipers prostrate before their altars. . . . Brother Masons, we rejoice to state that we are not without our share in this overthrow of the false prophets. The Roman Church founded on the Galilean myth began to decay rapidly from the very day on which organized Masonry was first established."[5]

Father Thurston makes the following comment:

"That the Popes have good reason for banning a Freemasonry animated with such a spirit as these words imply, will hardly be disputed by anyone; and this, be it noted, is the only form of Masonry with which they are in immediate contact. The Nathans, the Lemmis, and the Margiottas of the days of Leo XIII used the same kind of language."[6]

It is true, as Father Cooper points out, that the policy of Latin Masonry would not be tolerated an

[5]Speech of M. Delpech on September 20, 1902, reported in the *Compte Rendu du Grand Orient de France*, p. 381

[6]Rev. Herbert Thurston, S.J., *Freemasonry*, p. 25.

instant by the great bulk of the American Masonic fraternity. It is equally true, however, that constant efforts are being made to tighten the bonds between American and European Masonry. The two following statements can hardly be questioned:

1. Despite excommunications and schism within the Order, there does exist a certain degree of unity and of fellowship among Masons all over the world.[7]

2. The ultimate aims of organized Masonry are kept secret not only from the outside world, but also from a great multitude of the Masonic brethren, and care is taken to deceive the members in the lower degrees. Now in America is it precisely those admitted to the higher degrees who have been most violent in their attacks on the Catholic Church.

One writer states, "It is significant that

Every Anti-Catholic Association

whether A. P. A., Guardians of Liberty, Knights of Luther, *The Menace* and Watsonian dark brotherhoods, is invariaby manned by Masons . . . *The New Age* of Washington, the official organ of the

[7]The right of visit is one of the most important of all Masonic privileges because it is based on the principle of the identity of Masonic Institutions as one universal family . . .—***Encyclopædia of Freemasonry;*** article, "Visit, Right of."

Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite 33rd degree, has been and is as virulent and brazenly mendacious as *The Menace,* and as urgent for the destruction of Catholicism here as is the Grand Orient in France. There in the seat of our National Government, where there are thirty lodges of 10,000 members and where in every Government department they have besides established a special Masonic Club, this supreme organ, which is circulated in every lodge in the land and gives the keynote to the forty minor organs, is not only vilifying the Catholic Church in every number, but is demanding its destruction as insistently as the Grand Orients of Portugal and France."[8]

Before going further, it may be well to say a word or two about the organization of

Masonry in America

where about three-fourths of all the Masons in the world reside. The *World Almanac* of 1928 gives the number of Masons in the United States as 3,212,000. All of these are members of the Blue Lodge System, which comprises the first three degrees; and the majority of American Masons go no further. Those who do advance are divided between the American York Rite, (of seven degrees),

[8]Rev. Michael Kenny, S.J., *American Masonry and Catholic Education,* p. 12.

and the Scottish Rite, (of thirty degrees). It is calculated that perhaps 25 per cent of American Masons belong to the York Rite and something like 10 per cent to the Scottish Rite.[9]

The Catholic writers already named, quote abundantly from standard Masonic works,—a fair way of manifesting the true spirit of American Masonry.[10]

Mr. Arthur Preuss, who has made an elaborate study of Mackey's writings, cites them to prove that Masonry is a religion, and a religion incompatible with Christianity.

[9]The thirty-third and last degree is a badge of distinguished service. The number of active "thirty-thirds" is said to be not more than 75, although their honorary associates number perhaps 2,000. The Mystic Shrine, although open only to thirty-second degree Masons, is a purely social organization and not an integral part of the Masonic system.

[10]The chief authors quoted are:

Albert G. Mackey, author of an Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, and of other standard works. He is said to have contributed to the literature of Freemasonry more extensively than any other man in this country or Europe.

Albert Pike, author of the *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite,* etc. He was called the "Prophet of Freemasonry" and "the greatest Freemason of the nineteenth century," and was an honorary member of almost every Supreme Council in the world.

Commander Richardson, author of a famous Allocution promulgated in 1913. He succeeded Pike as the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Southern Supreme Council, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

J. D. Buck and Thomas M. Stewart, authors respectively of *The Genius of Freemasonry* and of *Symbolic Teachings*—two of the Masonic bestsellers. They popularized the more extensive works of Pike and are advertised very generally in Masonic publications, as well as in magazines of the type of *The Menace.*

Passages quoted from other writers show

Unmistakable Antagonism

to the Catholic Church. For example:

Pike says, "Neither of our political factions, Democratic or Republican, dares to resist the Roman Church's encroachments or warn the people of its insidious influences, which are incessantly making rotten the foundations of our free government."

Richardson appeals to all Masons to array themselves with the members of every Protestant church and with all patriotic Americans "as one band of brothers against the avowed purposes of the Hierarchy of Rome."

Buck says of the Catholic Church, "Her religion is as immoral as her politics are irreligious and devilish."

Stewart says the Catholic Schools are "the breeding ground of convicts and traitors, nurseries of treason under the cloak of religion."

In addition to the above quotations, Catholic writers cite also *The New Age* of Washington, official organ of the Scottish Rite, and *The American Freemason,* organ of the Blue Lodges. The matter may be summarized by saying that *The New Age* habitually abuses the Papacy, the Catholic hierarchy, the priesthood and many beliefs sacred to Catholics. It has proclaimed that "Masonry is

more than a religion; it *is* Religion," and that "Masonry is the mother church."

The American Freemason regards the alliance of Masonry with *The Menace* as unfortunate, and views with regret "eruptions of blackguardism." The editor, however, has no illusions with regard to the actual relationship of the Church and Masonry. Here is his editorial statement:

"This magazine has never swerved from the position that between the Masonic fraternity and the Catholic Church there is an antagonism inherent to the nature of the organizations: the one seeking to broadcast liberty of thought and the other striving to stifle all revolt against the self-constituted authority that would hold mind and soul in thraldom. We have declared that there can be no peace nor even truce between Freemasonry and the official Roman Church."

The Fellowship Forum, though not officially a Masonic organ, is edited by Mr. George Fleming Moore, who was Grand Commander of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in 1921, when he helped to found the magazine just named. Its chief activities seem to be to support the Masons and to attack the Catholic Church.

The Above

is an outline of the Catholic side of the case.

All in all, it seems to justify the opinion of the Protestant editor who wrote:

"The anti-Catholic attitude taken by Masonic lodges generally, and especially in their official organs, such as *The New Age,* forces Catholics to view Masonry with suspicion and distrust, if not prejudice."

"The very nature of Freemasonry, and especially its anti-Catholic proclivities, places the Catholic Church in a position where it must oppose the great secret order to be consistent with its teachings."[11]

In connection with the opinion expressed by the non-Catholic, Windle, it may be noted that the Church has not been the only enemy of Freemasonry, in this country. Just a century ago, there was a violent reaction against the activities of

The Invisible Empire

which had begun to make its influence felt in American life. John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States, in 1833 wrote: "I do conscientiously and sincerely believe that the Order of Freemasonry, if not the greatest, is one of the greatest moral and political evils under which this Union is now laboring."

Theodore Graebner, a Lutheran Minister, has written: "Yet we should not permit the more sin-

[11]C. A. Windle, *Truth and Light,* July, 1926, p. 24.

ister aspect of the lodge system to escape us, its significance as a secret empire, binding its members to an alliance which has no precedent of justification in human history, which is not only a constant potential menace to the fundamental safeguards of citizenship and is the very antithesis of the American ideal of the square deal, but which has left its trail on the administration of our courts, sparing neither the bench nor the jury-box."[12]

Readers may recall that, during the World War,

General Resentment

was occasioned in this country because American citizens quite commonly felt that all non-Masons in the United States service were discriminated against; and this sentiment was strengthened by the memory of the famous "Affaire des Fiches" of 1905, when the French Army and the French Government were shown to be practically under the control of a small well-organized minority made up of Masons.[13]

[12]*The Secret Empire,* p. viii.

[13]" 'Any officer who was known to cherish religious convictions, whose children were being educated in a denominational school, or whose wife attended Mass, was made the subject of an index-slip drawn up by the local Masonic lodge and confidentially despatched to the War Office, at that time almost entirely staffed by Freemasons. These slips were then collected and formed a register, which popularly went by the nickname of "Carthage," an allusion of the famous *delenda est Carthago* of Cato. Such unfortunate officers as had the ill-luck to figure in this black book might say good-bye to all hope of promotion, no matter what their military capacity.' (Cf. *Freemasonry,* p. 22.)

"The same sort of pressure was applied to civilians and to every

A somewhat similar, though less acute feeling was awakened more recently, when the *Fellowship Forum* appealed publicly to sixty-seven Masons in the United States Senate—in virtue of their solemn obligations as Freemasons—to vote against an administration measure in order to protect Italian Masons from persecution at the hands of Mussolini.

The preceding pages present a brief and very incomplete summary of the testimony adduced by Catholic writers. It will however, serve to place the reader in a position to give a verdict. Setting aside, for the time being, all questions of the intrinsic merits of the disputants, he can at least determine who is responsible for the irreconcilable antagonism between the Catholic Church and Masonry.

Are the Masons to Blame?

To answer "No," would be to censure the Catholic Church for having recognized a fact which

kind of civil functionary, but this interference with the army touched French public opinion in its tenderest point. None the less in 1912 and 1913, just before the war, Freemasonry still maintained a stranglehold upon French political life. At that period in a population of roughly 40 millions, the Grand Orient of France, and the Grand Lodge combined, claimed only a membership of 36,000 Masons. Yet in the Chamber 300 deputies out of a total of 580, and in the Senate 180 senators out of 300, were members of Masonic organizations. They thus had an absolute majority in both departments of the legislature. Surely this fact alone is of supreme significance. The Masons formed less than one in a thousand of the total population, but yet they ruled the country and their rule was a reign of terror."

is notorious, namely that in principle and in deed Masonry is opposed to Catholicism. The average American will not blame the Church for doing that. Once he has learned the facts, he will say that the Catholic Church has done only what it had a perfect right to do, according to the universally recognized right of self-defense and the American standard of fair play. To the Catholic Church such a verdict will be eminently satisfactory.

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